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ARTICLES:

(1) DPJ's Ozawa "indebted" to SDP over Diet Law amendment; SDP hopes for quid pro quo on Futenma issue

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
December 29, 2009

The outline of a bill to amend the Diet Law, an issue Democratic Party of Japan Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa feels strongly about, obtained the approval of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the

People's New Party at a meeting of the secretaries general and Diet Affairs Committee chairmen of the three ruling parties on Dec. 28, thus gaining momentum for its submission to and enactment at the regular Diet session. So far, the amendment of the Diet Law has in principle required unanimous approval by the Diet. It is unclear whether the bill can obtain the approval of the opposition parties.

The meeting held at the Diet lasted about 30 minutes. Secretary General Yasumasa Shigeno of the SDP, which had been cautious about amending the Diet Law, made the demand that "(the amendment) should also give consideration to the smaller parties" but did not oppose the bill.

The SDP had been against the amendment because the bill Ozawa envisions will no longer designate the director general of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau as a "special adviser to the government," which "may enable the government to revise the constitution through interpretation at will." The main reason behind its shift to accepting the bill is that its demand for the creation of a "hearing" system to solicit the opinions of bureaucrats will be met.

Shigeno told Ozawa at the meeting: "I hope the Prime Minister will keep in mind that this is a coalition government when he speaks." Ozawa reportedly hit his own head a few times and said: "I will put your words here (in my head)."

The SDP is concerned that Hatoyama has said that the relocation of the U.S. forces' Futenma Air Station to Guam, which the party is advocating, will be difficult. Therefore, it appears that the SDP is

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trying to make Ozawa owe them one over the Diet Law and enlist him as an ally on the Futenma issue in order to draw concessions from the Prime Minister."

In reaction to this move of the ruling parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is opposing the legal amendment because "free deliberations in the Diet may be restricted" (according to a senior party official). It seems that because the debate on the amendment was initiated by Ozawa, the LDP "does not want to allow Ozawa to take the credit."

Ozawa said at a news conference on Dec. 7: "If we fail to reach agreement (with the opposition parties), the only option is to pass the bill with a majority vote. That is a principle of democracy," indicating his intention to pass the bill even at the expense of going against convention. The debate on Diet Law amendment is likely to become a contentious issue between the ruling and opposition parties at the regular Diet session.

(2) U.S. State Dept. disavows Crowley's statement that the ambassador visited of his own accord

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 3) (Full)
December 25, 2009

Tokyo

U.S. Secretary of State Clinton reportedly summoned Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Ichiro Fujisaki to the State Department about the issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma airfield. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, having inquired of the department about the facts, indicated on Dec. 24 that department spokesperson Philip Crowley's statement was incorrect. Crowley said in a press briefing on the 22nd that Clinton did not summon Fujisaki, but the ambassador visited the department.

A Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Division official explained this to Lower House members Kantoku Teruya and Ryoichi Hattori, who requested an explanation of the circumstances behind the ambassador's visiting the State Department.

According to Hattori, when the Foreign Ministry asked the State Department for confirmation of the statement in question, it explained that Crowley's statement was incorrect and that Fujisaki

visited the department at Clinton's behest. However, the Foreign Ministry did not answer when asked who confirmed the facts or when and how.

Hattori said: "The Foreign Ministry explained, 'Because the State Department is dealing with problems around the world, it probably made a mistake. Although the Futenma issue is said to have created a crisis in Japan-U.S. relations, a mistake of this sort was made. Questions remain."

(3) Interview with Hiroshi Nakanishi, Kyoto University professor, on gravity of Japan-U.S. alliance - It was a serious mistake for the Hatoyama administration to allow the Futenma relocation to develop into a political issue

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
December 29, 2009

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The issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station will probably not destroy the Japan-U.S. alliance itself. But it could trigger the deterioration of the bilateral alliance. It was a huge mistake for the Hatoyama administration to allow the Futenma relocation to develop into a political issue. The administration should have pushed ahead with the relocation plan while listening to the views of the local leaders to achieve the removal of the dangerous airfield by setting aside what (the Democratic Party of Japan) used to call for when it was an opposition party.

The United States thought that Japan was becoming its global partner through such events as the 1996 Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security and the dispatch of Self-Defense Force troops to Iraq and the Indian Ocean. But the Hatoyama administration has pressed Washington for a review of the Futenma relocation plan, citing public opinion and the circumstances of (the DPJ's) coalition partner. This is certain to prompt Washington to earnestly reexamine Japan's role in U.S. military and security strategy.

I think the United States will reduce its military presence in Japan if Tokyo requests that. In such a case, there are only two options for Japan in maintaining its alliance with the United States: either to continue providing funds to support America's foreign policy or to make international contributions actively by reviewing its self-imposed restrictions on the use of force.

To begin with, the significance of the presence of U.S. forces in Japan lies in its deterrent effect, with the United States regarding an attack on Japan as an attack on itself. I do not think that at present there is any country that is planning to attack and occupy Japan. But other countries might think that if the support of the United States is gone, it will be easier to apply pressure on Japan. To put it bluntly, there will be a greater possibility of Japan being looked down upon and pressed for concessions. Is Japan going to deal with matters with a readiness to face disputes and friction or back off by practicing patience? There will be many situations in which Japan will be pressed to make difficult decisions.

The Philippines required the United States to withdraw most of its troops from the country. But Japan's situation is different from that of the Philippines because it is situated in close proximity to Russia, China, and North Korea, which are all armed with nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister has declared that the Japan-U.S. alliance is the cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy. Despite that, he has failed to make a decision on the Futenma issue. It has now apparently become difficult to implement the existing relocation plan. Then again, I do not think the government can come up with a new proposal in several months. Japan's lack of ability to make political decisions is a true concern for the Japan-U.S. alliance.

(4) Editorial: Futenma relocation: Make serious efforts to look for relocation site outside Okinawa

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)

December 29, 2009

The working team of the government and the ruling parties to look for a new relocation site for the U.S. Marines' Futenma Air Station has been launched.

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This is a fresh start for the new administration that has been zigzagging on this issue for over 100 days after its inauguration. While relocation to Henoko in Nago City under the Japan-U.S. agreement reached three years ago has not been ruled out as an option, utmost efforts should be made to look at the possibility of relocation out of Okinawa.

It will not be easy to come up with an alternative proposal. Considering the noise problem and the risks of crime and accidents involving U.S. service personnel, it is improbable that a local government willing to accept a U.S. military base can be found with little effort.

Even if the Hatoyama administration identifies a new candidate relocation site, there is no guarantee that it will be acceptable to the U.S. side, which insists that relocation to Henoko is the only feasible option. The negotiation process will be fraught with difficulties.

The Hatoyama administration probably wants to do what it can to correct the abnormal situation wherein 75 percent of U.S. military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa in full awareness of such difficulties and even to the extent of taking the risk of reviewing the agreement between the two governments. It is meaningful that the Hatoyama administration is taking up this formidable challenge after the historic change of administration.

However, there is one important issue here: It is necessary to compensate for the deterrence the U.S. Marines in Okinawa provide for Japan's defense and regional stability. Recognition of that necessity is probably the basis of the deliberation process from now on.

With regard to this, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's statement last weekend that it will be difficult to relocate all the Marines on the Futenma base to Guam is a meaningful clarification of the issue. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano, who chairs the working team, has also indicated that he will attach importance to such a point of view.

How the Japanese mainland should share the heavy burden the bases impose on Okinawa has been a serious problem since the time of the Liberal Democratic Party administrations. Osaka Governor Toru Hashimoto recently pointed to the fact that Okinawa served as a shield for the defense of the mainland during the Pacific War, thus becoming the scene of devastating ground fighting, and indicated that he will not reject discussions on the relocation (of some of Futenma's functions) to Kansai Airport.

In the past, live ammunition exercises by U.S. forces in Okinawa have been transferred to five locations on the mainland, including Hokkaido and Miyagi Prefecture. Kanagawa, Yamaguchi, Aomori, and other prefectures also host U.S. military facilities.

The great significance of Japan as a whole setting a goal of the relocation of U.S. bases (not just Futenma) out of Okinawa should not be forgotten.

The Prime Minister has clearly stated that a decision on the relocation site will be made by May. There are doubts about whether a decision will really be made because the House of Councillors election is taking place next summer.

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The U.S. government has been dismayed by the Prime Minister's

wavering in his statements on this issue and the discrepancy in the views expressed by cabinet ministers, which render the administration's diplomatic intentions ambiguous.

If the administration continues to zigzag, it will lose credibility, and domestic coordination on relocation out of Okinawa will be jeopardized. Any further procrastination is absolutely impermissible. The administration's credibility is at stake.

(5) Poll on Hatoyama cabinet, political parties

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
December 27, 2009

Questions & Answers

(Figures are percentages. Parentheses denote the results of the last survey conducted Nov. 28-29.)

Q: Do you support the Hatoyama cabinet?

Yes 47.2 (63.7)
No 38.1 (25.1)
Don't know (D/K) + no answer (N/A) 14.7 (11.2)

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes" to the previous question) What is the primary reason for your approval of the Hatoyama cabinet? Pick only one from among those listed below.

The prime minister is trustworthy 11.3 (5.1)
Because it's a coalition cabinet of the Democratic Party of Japan, Social Democratic Party, and People's New Party 7.5 (7.8)
The prime minister has leadership ability 0.6 (1.8)
Something can be expected of its economic policies 7.6 (10.2)
Something can be expected of its foreign policy 1.3 (2.6)
Something can be expected of its political reforms 22.0 (37.2)
Something can be expected of its tax reforms 5.3 (6.1)
Something can be expected of its administrative reforms 17.1 (13.7)
There's no other appropriate person (for prime minister) 25.6 (13.9)
Other answers (O/A) 0.3 (---)
D/K+N/A 1.4 (1.6)

Q: (Only for those who answered "no" to the first question) What is the primary reason for your disapproval of the Hatoyama cabinet? Pick only one from among those listed below.

The prime minister is untrustworthy 16.5 (20.2)
Because it's a coalition cabinet of the Democratic Party of Japan, Social Democratic Party, and People's New Party 12.4 (12.9)
The prime minister lacks leadership ability 24.1 (9.2)
Nothing can be expected of its economic policies 20.4 (33.4)
Nothing can be expected of its foreign policy 8.2 (2.0)
Nothing can be expected of its political reforms 5.3 (5.9)
Nothing can be expected of its tax reforms 5.4 (4.6)
Nothing can be expected of its administrative reforms 1.6 (2.5)
Don't like the prime minister's personal character 4.0 (7.2)
O/A 0.1 (---)
D/K+N/A 1.0 (2.1)

Q: Which political party do you support?

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Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 36.1 (45.0)
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP or Jiminto) 23.7 (16.2)
New Komeito (NK) 1.9 (4.1)
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 1.3 (2.4)
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1.8 (2.1)
Your Party (YP or Minna no To) 1.7 (1.4)
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 1.1 (0.3)
Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) --- (---)
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0.6 (0.4)
Other political parties, groups --- (---)
None 30.5 (27.8)
D/K+N/A 1.3 (0.3)

Q: Prime Minister Hatoyama's fund-managing body has falsified its political fund reports. In this regard, Prime Minister Hatoyama explained in a press conference that he had entrusted everything to his secretary. Is this account convincing?

Yes 17.8

No 76.1

D/K+N/A 6.1

Q: Prime Minister Hatoyama's secretary has been indicted without arrest. What do you think Prime Minister Hatoyama should do?

Resign as prime minister to take responsibility 21.1

Fulfill his public accountability and take steps to improve the situation while staying on as prime minister 64.3

Dissolve the House of Representatives to seek the judgment of the people 6.3

No need to take responsibility since his former secretary is to blame 3.8

D/K+K/A 4.5

Q: The DPJ, in its manifesto for this summer's general election, pledged to abolish gasoline and other road-related provisional surcharges. However, the government has decided to retain these surcharges due to severe fiscal conditions. What do you think?

Approve 13.0

Approve to a certain degree 38.1

Don't approve very much 26.5

Don't approve 18.9

D/K+N/A 3.5

Q: The government has decided not to set an income limit for child allowances to be provided next year. What do you think?

Approve 17.9

Approve to a certain degree 23.3

Don't approve very much 26.5

Don't approve 30.5

D/K+N/A 1.8

Q: The government decided to retain the already-existing childcare benefits as local burdens, which the government had planned to abolish with the introduction of child allowances. What do you think?

Approve 7.9

Approve to a certain degree 25.3

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Don't approve very much 34.9

Don't approve 25.9

D/K+N/A 6.0

Q: The government has deferred its conclusion on the issue of relocating the U.S. military's Futenma airfield to next year. What do you think?

Approve 8.2

Approve to a certain degree 20.0

Don't approve very much 33.2

Don't approve 34.7

D/K+N/A 3.9

Q: What do you think the government should do about the Futenma relocation?

Relocate Futenma airfield to a coastal area of the U.S. military's Camp Schwab in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, in line with the agreement reached between Japan and the U.S. 31.1

Review the Japan-U.S. agreement and look for another relocation site outside Okinawa Prefecture and in Japan 18.3

Review the Japan-U.S. agreement and relocate Futenma airfield outside Japan 41.0

O/A 0.1

D/K+N/A 9.5

Q: Concerning the recent audience of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping with H.M. the Emperor, the Imperial Household Agency rejected the proposal of this imperial audience, maintaining that it was against the rule that requires all requests to be made at least a month in advance. This exceptionally granted audience has been criticized as a practice of using the Emperor for political purposes. What do you think?

The criticism is correct 54.7
The criticism is incorrect 37.9
D/K+N/A 7.4

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted across the nation on Dec. 25-26 by Kyodo News Service on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Among randomly generated telephone numbers, those actually for household use with one or more eligible voters totaled 1,470. Answers were obtained from 1,030 persons.

(6) Editorial: Japan should adopt FTA strategy involving China and Taiwan as well

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
December 28, 2009

China and Taiwan have agreed to aim at concluding an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA), equivalent to a free trade agreement. They will likely do so as early as the first half of next year. An ever-expanding Asian trade zone calls into question Japan's FTA strategy.

Chairman Chiang Pin-kung of the Straits Exchange Foundation, Taiwan's point of contact with China, and Chairman Chen Yunlin of the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits from the Chinese side on Dec. 22 met in Taichung in central Taiwan and agreed to launch talks on an ECFA.

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Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou stressed the necessity for a China-Taiwan ECFA, noting, "Once an FTA between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) comes into effect on Jan. 1 next year, Taiwan's products could lose competitiveness on the mainland market." He thus explained that signing an ECFA with China is an inevitable option, because 40 percent of Taiwan's exports are China-bound.

Taiwan is also motivated by the desire to make an FTA with China lead to an FTA with ASEAN and Japan. Taiwan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) right after China. Since then, it has been searching for the opportunity to sign FTAs with various countries. However, it has been unable to receive favorable responses from countries that have diplomatic relations with China.

For Taiwan, the China-Taiwan ECFA will be the first free trade agreement with an Asian country. It could represent a breakthrough for Taiwan. The Philippines has already expressed a desire to join the China-Taiwan ECFA in regions close to Taiwan. It is time for Japan, which is conspicuously lagging in FTA strategy, to reverse this situation with a multilateral initiative involving China and Taiwan.

Chances are that Japanese companies could face fiercer competition with Taiwanese companies in the Chinese market and with Chinese companies in the Taiwanese market. On the other hand, using capable Taiwanese personnel, they would find it easier to set up businesses in the Chinese market and to make inroads into the Taiwanese market by exploiting their production bases in China. They will require a broad-based strategy.

The Democratic Progressive Party, Taiwan's largest opposition party, which is very wary of China, sees risk in excessive integration of the Taiwanese economy with the Chinese economy. It criticizes the Ma administration as moving ahead with talks with China in an unclear manner.

There is also rising concern about competition with Chinese products becoming fiercer and Taiwanese industries hollowing out.

When Chairman Chen visited Taichung, there were major demonstrations against his visit. This is seen as one reason that the Kuomintang, the Ma administration's ruling party, was defeated in local elections earlier in the month. The Ma administration has been rapidly promoting relations with China since its launch in May last year. However, it would behoove the administration to slow down the pace of talks and carefully explain its intentions for the sake of increasing transparency.

China's Community Party administration is characterizing an ECFA with Taiwan as part of its unification strategy. We also must keep an eye on the impact of the development of China-Taiwan relations on Japan's security.

ROOS